

**DECLARATION OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> SUMMIT OF THE SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**  
**Athens, 17.9.2021**

We, the Heads of State and Government of Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain met on September 17<sup>th</sup> in Athens, for the 8<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Southern countries of the EU.

We welcome Croatia and Slovenia in the Southern European countries group (EUMED); their participation will make us stronger and enrich our discussions and our vision for the future of Europe.

In the face of different and yet equally serious challenges, Europe is confronted with, in a wide variety of fields, such as environment and climate, health, economy, security and stability, it is more crucial than ever to strengthen the European foundations, address the EU's structural deficiencies, enhance the European dimension of defense and build up our collective resilience.

**Peace, Security and Stability in the Mediterranean**

A peaceful, stable, secure and prosperous Mediterranean is a strategic priority for the EU. The Southern European countries, act as a pillar of stability in the region, by sharing a common approach with regard to the challenges and a joint vision about the future of the Mediterranean region and of Europe as a whole. The Mediterranean faces a number of ongoing crises, affecting all countries and peoples of the region and beyond. We call on all countries in the region to respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights that EU Member States have over their maritime zones in accordance with international law including the law of the sea. We underline that the delimitation of the Continental Shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone should be addressed by peaceful means of dispute settlement and in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). We reiterate our call on Turkey to accept the invitation by Cyprus to engage in dialogue on the delimitation of the maritime zones between their relevant coasts, including by submitting the issue to the International Court of Justice. In line with the relevant European Council Conclusions as well as the Statement of 25 March 2021, it is fundamental that all States unequivocally abide by international legality and abstain, in a consistent and permanent manner, from provocations or unilateral actions in breach of international law. We reaffirm our determination, in case of such action, to use the instruments and options at the disposal of the European Union to defend its interests and those of its Member States as well as to uphold regional stability. We reiterate our readiness to engage with Turkey in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner to enhance cooperation in a number of areas of common interest, subject to the respect of conditionalities set out by the European Council last June.

We reiterate our strong commitment to a viable comprehensive settlement of the **Cyprus issue** on the basis of a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality, as set out in the relevant UNSC Resolutions, which are binding on all, and in line with the EU acquis, values and principles. Therefore, proposals for a two-state solution are unacceptable. Efforts to resume negotiations should not be further undermined by illegal and provocative behaviour in the maritime zones and on the territory of

Cyprus. We strongly condemn Turkish illegal actions in the fenced-off area of Varosha, which run contrary to Resolutions 550(1984) and 789(1992), and call for their reversal in line with the UNSC Presidential Statement of 23 July 2021 and the Declaration of the High Representative on behalf of the European Union of 27 July 2021.

The **Middle East Peace Process** remains the only way to reach a negotiated solution for the establishment of two States living in peace and security along secure and recognized borders, and based on agreed parameters and international law. We welcome the recent resumption of high-level contacts between the Governments of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, and encourage the resumption of bilateral cooperation between the parties. We welcome as well the ongoing efforts, spearheaded by Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and other regional and international partners to consolidate stability after the recent crisis. We also call on the parties to refrain from any unilateral measures undermining the future of a just and lasting solution to the conflict. We stress the need to cease all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem, in accordance with relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. We stand ready, within the EU, including in the framework of the Middle East Quartet to support Israel and the Palestinians in their efforts to rebuild a meaningful political process.

We are following with great concern signs of possible resurgence of violence to the already war-torn **Syria**. We call on all parties to a nationwide ceasefire, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015), and to ensure protection of civilians, emphasizing the humanitarian dimension of the situation and the need for unimpeded humanitarian access, including through cross-border and cross-line access. In this context, we welcome the decision by the Security Council, last July, to extend the UN cross-border aid operation in northwest Syria for another 12 months. While reiterating our full support to the UN Special Envoy, Geir Pedersen, we agree on the need to step up our efforts to relaunch the political process, under the auspices of the United Nations, and to guarantee the unity, national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, the creation of all necessary conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the refugees, securing at the same time the withdrawal of all foreign troops. We will continue to make the normalization of relations with Damascus conditional on the implementation of a credible and lasting political solution.

Since 2019, **Lebanon** has been facing an unprecedented crisis, which was further aggravated due to the devastating explosion at the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2020, the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, the large migratory influx as well as the ongoing economic crisis and political uncertainty. We stand in full solidarity and support to the Lebanese people. In order to ensure the sustainability of any progress achieved, political stability and social cohesion need to be safeguarded. We welcome the formation of new government headed by Najib Mikati. This government has to proceed swiftly to the implementation of all required reforms. We express our readiness to support the Lebanese government to the implementation of the measures expected by the Lebanese population and the international community.

The political process in **Libya** brought a new Unified Transitional Authority, with the mandate to lead the country to free and fair elections on 24 December 2021. We encourage all Libyan stakeholders to tackle remaining challenges remain with regard to the unification of the institutions, the clarification of the constitutional basis and the adoption of the legal framework for the holding of scheduled elections, as well as the full implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, and notably its provision for

the demobilization, disarmament and withdrawal of all foreign forces, fighters and mercenaries. In this vein, the continuous EU engagement remains crucial. We reiterate our support to the Libyan people in their ongoing efforts to a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned resolution of the crisis and urge all stakeholders to contribute constructively to this end. We underline the importance of coastal States' joint efforts in Search and Rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean Sea in accordance with relevant international conventions and the international Law of the Sea. We urge all stakeholders to further increase efforts to prevent the illegal migration flows, as well as human trafficking and smuggling, and to prevent violations of the arms embargo. We also reiterate our full commitment to uphold and enforce the arms embargo, including through Operation EUNAVFOR MED Irini.

Regarding **Tunisia**, we reiterate the importance of safeguarding democracy, constitutional procedures and the Rule of Law. An effective and functioning government is essential to tackle the ongoing economic crisis, which requires an urgent solution. We continue to offer our full support to the country's efforts to counter the social and economic crisis that worsened with the pandemic and, hence, outline the necessity of safeguarding Tunisia's and regional stability. We also urge all stakeholders to address irregular migration and tackle its root causes.

We are very concerned by the developments in **Afghanistan**. The right of the Afghan people to live in dignity, peace and security and the protection and safety of EU citizens, local staff working for the EU or member states, and people at risk because of their commitment to protect civil rights, is of utmost importance. We appeal for respect of human rights and international humanitarian law. In this respect, we call on the Afghan leadership to fully cooperate with international donors and UN agencies and to allow an unhindered access of humanitarian operators to all areas of the country. Combating terrorism and preventing the use of Afghan territory by international terrorist groups remains a priority. We urge the authorities to fully cooperate in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking and support international efforts to this end. We also remain committed to enhancing the EU's ability to act as a global security provider. We support the ongoing international outreach efforts to solve the Afghan crisis including the initiative promoted by the Italian Presidency of the G20. Special attention should be given to the respect of human rights in the country, according to international law, in particular the rights of the most vulnerable, including women and children, human rights defenders and persons belonging to minorities. International cooperation must be established, especially with neighbouring countries, to deal with Afghans fleeing the country. The EU should play an important role, in this aspect of the crisis, in cooperation with all potential partners, while at the same time preventing human trafficking and smuggling. Afghanistan is home to monuments of world significance, highlighting the common cultural heritage and historic links between Europe and Asia. It is therefore important that they are adequately preserved and protected for the benefit of all humanity, according to the applicable international law.

We renew our determination to comprehensively address the ever-intensifying spectrum of hybrid threats both by state and non-state actors. We reiterate our strong commitment to address the phenomenon of **violent extremism and terrorism**, by further deepening our understanding on its root causes and its underlying factors. It is essential that we provide opportunities especially for young persons by, inter alia, using gender responsive approaches, to strengthen resilience against radicalization. Terrorist action is constantly transformed, following technological changes and trends. The possibilities offered by the Internet, as demonstrated especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, may provide a unique tool to terrorists, who misuse it for specific purposes, such as propaganda,

recruitment, training, money laundering and financing. Fighting against the financing of terrorism is a difficult endeavour; trafficking and trading cultural property, including goods illegally excavated in archaeological sites in conflict zones constitute a substantial means of financing terrorist groups, as well as a source of deep concern for the protection of cultural heritage worldwide. We are committed to enhancing cooperation, both internationally and within the EU framework, including through exchanging information, and further addressing these aspects in the relevant fora.

We reiterate our commitment to support the countries of the **Sahel region**, whose situation remains fragile. In Mali, it is essential that the transition underway end on time with the organization, on 22 February 2022, of elections under the conditions agreed with international partners, in particular ECOWAS and the African Union. We will continue pursuing three objectives in the region: fighting terrorism, which remains our priority; stepping up military cooperation, in order to accelerate the build-up of the Sahelian armies via, in particular, the European Union Training Mission in Mali, the accompanying mission of the European Task Force Takuba, as well as our bilateral cooperation mechanism; and maintaining the reassurance of international forces, first and foremost MINUSMA. We also restate our willingness to help these countries, through efforts which go far beyond the fight against armed terrorist groups. It is through support for the return of administrations and public services throughout the country, through increased cooperation between the various actors and through support for the development of all regions of the country that we will, together, achieve a lasting solution to the crisis factors. This is the objective of the international commitment to the Sahel Coalition.

### **European Agenda**

In response to the degradation of our strategic environment, the intensifying strategic competition, and the growing contest of global commons spaces (such as maritime, air, and cyber domains) which brings crises closer to the European territory and generates deeper implications for our security, we acknowledge the need for the EU to take a significant step towards a greater European capacity to act in the field of security and defense. This ambition, which must be implemented quickly after the adoption of the Strategic Compass by March 2022, should infuse all levels of decision and contribute to the construction of a converging strategic culture on defense and security among all Member States and EU institutions, building a coherent and shared European vision of current and future security challenges that will strengthen our external actions and enable Europe to reinforce its own security.

The historic agreement reached on Next Generation EU on 21 July 2020 created an unprecedented and innovative instrument for a coordinated European recovery in response to the COVID-19 crisis, which led to the adoption of comprehensive, balanced and qualitative Recovery and Resilience Plans. It is a strong signal, that of a Europe of solidarity, greater economic and social convergence, supporting the digital, environmental and climate priorities. Our efforts must continue to ensure the proper implementation of the growth-enhancing investments included in the plans and the swift disbursements of the funds to support the recovery. European investment should be directed primarily to green and digital twin transitions, also after the immediate recovery, aiming at increasing our pre-pandemic potential growth. We also look forward to the relaunch of the discussion on the Economic Governance Review.

Economic recovery should go hand in hand with strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion. Reducing poverty and social exclusion, as well as up-skilling and re-skilling of the workforce,

lies at the heart of our collective efforts. The effective and speedy implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, along the lines of the Commission's relevant Action Plan, as endorsed in the Porto Social Summit, on 7-8 May 2021, is the best way to ensure that this historic transformation is conducted in terms of fairness, leaving no one behind. We are committed to reducing inequalities and discrimination, especially between women and men, defending fair wages, fighting social exclusion and tackling poverty. There cannot be sustainable recovery without, ultimately, reinvigorating the European Social Model and implementing the National Plans for Recovery and Resilience, as they represent a historic opportunity to support the next generation of European citizens.

One of the main international strategic challenges that our Union is facing is how to respond to migration movements. In coherence with the June European Council Conclusions and as highlighted by the Afghan crisis, to tackle this challenge, a comprehensive approach is required. In light of the proposals within the new **European Pact on Migration and Asylum**, we expect a constructive approach, so that the principle of solidarity is strengthened and applied in combination with that of fair sharing of responsibility, as stated in art. 80 of the TFEU. We welcome the objectives of the New Pact with regard to the external dimension of migration and the need to strengthen partnerships and cooperation with third countries, which was also highlighted by the latest European Council Conclusions. We underline the need for swift implementation and regular assessments of these partnerships, both at the political and operational level. To this end, we recall the urgency to put forward action plans for priority countries of origin and transit in autumn 2021, indicating clear objectives, further support measures and concrete timelines. It is essential that all migratory routes in the Mediterranean and Western Atlantic are tackled and all potential partnerships strengthened. We deem it important to cooperate with African countries and with countries along various roads, including the Western Balkans. We call for a united and coordinated European voice towards third countries in order to achieve and maintain fruitful cooperation, including an effective return and readmission system. To address the root causes of migration, it is necessary to utilize a combination of specific actions, such as enhancing security efforts, building state capacity, developing legal pathways for employment and improving reception, asylum and return systems in the neighbouring third countries, in a Team Europe spirit, and ensuring close cooperation of UN organizations, especially IOM and UNHCR with the host countries. Building on the Commission's communication on an EU return strategy, we are ready to work towards enhancing assisted voluntary returns from third countries, in order to support their migration management efforts and reduce the risk of further irregular flows.

The **instrumentalisation of migration** for geopolitical purposes is inhumane and violates human rights. There is no doubt that cooperation between the EU and third countries is crucial to handle migration flows to prevent smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings and an essential component of the external dimension of EU migration policy. At the same time, we need to prevent instrumentalisation of human suffering for political goals and to come to a common understanding on how to deal with orchestrated attempts at irregular crossings. We emphasize the need for effective protection of the external borders of the EU in accordance with international and European law and for preventing illegal entries.

EU's economic **recovery** depends to a great extent on the **green and digital transitions**. Digital transformation contributes to the goal of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. The Next Generation EU along with the Updated New Industrial Strategy of Europe and the Digital Compass constitute an integrated policy framework, the fast and full implementation of which will allow for the twin transition to become sustainable in the long run. The recent Commission proposal on climate

neutrality (“fit for 55” package), aiming to make the target of climate neutrality by 2050 a reality and deliver on the targets agreed in the European Climate Law, sets the stage for an ambitious EU climate policy. We welcome the role of the G20, currently under Italian Presidency, to promote a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery. We see value in a Carbon Border Adjustment mechanism, which serves as a climate measure that effectively mitigates carbon leakage risks while fully complying with WTO rules.

A European approach has proven essential in **tackling the COVID-19 pandemic**. The EU manifested resilience by acting in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation. In particular, the EU offered, since its inception, support to the ACT-Accelerator and its COVAX Facility that enabled so far the delivery of 243 million doses to 139 countries globally. The EU has also been particularly active in dose donations to low income countries, with 250 million pledged doses, with a particular attention to the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods and Africa. As humanity faces challenges that know no national borders, international cooperation remains essential, through the strengthening and reform of the WHO, and the reinforcement of the International Health Regulations (IHR). At the same time, we need to overcome weaknesses in our health systems, such as by ensuring access to medicines in all Member States, and prepare, effectively and in time, against future crises. The Global Health Summit, co-hosted by Italy and the European Commission, and its Rome Declaration of principles on pandemic preparedness will be instrumental to achieving stronger health systems. It is necessary to reinforce existing EU health agencies (ECDC and EMA) and promote the creation of a European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA). It is absolutely essential to strengthen our health sovereignty. We notably need the EU to develop its own production capacities of critical health products. Restoring free movement within the EU and international traveling is essential for the day after. The adoption of the EU Digital Covid Certificate has proven a valuable tool for the protection of public health and has significantly facilitated the movement of citizens, while at the same time boosting tourism and the economy. We believe as well that in view of the progress in vaccination, the time has come to reflect on the best way to relaunch international travel on a common basis.

Above all, we recall that vaccination remains the most effective tool in fighting the pandemic and in this regard addressing the problem of vaccine skepticism is a high priority among the challenges we face. Therefore, continuing with the information campaigns and countering disinformation and fake news is an important task ahead of us.

We look forward to having a substantive and ambitious discussion within the **Conference on the Future of Europe**, under the current Slovenian and the next French Presidencies of the Council of the EU, with the objective of achieving concrete results and bringing the EU closer to its citizens, especially to the benefit of European youth. The Conference presents a first-class opportunity for reinvigorating the European project in all its dimensions.

### **New Agenda for the Mediterranean**

We reaffirm the strategic importance of the Southern Neighbourhood. In this context, we welcome the Joint Communication from the Commission and the High Representative on a renewed and reinforced partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood and reiterate our call for its speedy and efficient implementation, as stated by the Council. We reiterate our commitment, in accordance with the outcomes of the 2020 Union for the Mediterranean Barcelona Ministerial Forum, and the New Agenda for the Mediterranean -an approach that aims to tackle well-known issues, but also

incorporates new areas and forms of cooperation identified in the last few years, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis- to working with our Mediterranean partners with the aim of guaranteeing long-term stability, security and sustainable development in the Mediterranean region promoting and protecting good governance, **human rights and fundamental freedoms, including gender equality**, and strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law and supporting all aspects relating to an inclusive and non- discriminatory civil society. These elements are an integral part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and of our Southern Partnership since the 1995 Barcelona Declaration and remain in the core of our Partnership Priorities. To this end, we need to significantly strengthen the political dialogue across the Mediterranean.

In order to enhance regional **resilience**, we need to commit to an open, stable and fair trade and investment environment both at multilateral and bilateral levels. We stress the need to build an extrovert digital agenda taking into account the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to rely more on secure and trustworthy digital tools and connectivity, highlighting, at the same time, the crucial role of cybersecurity and of improved digital connectivity across the Mediterranean Basin, spearheading flagship cross-border projects, such as submarine data cables and backbones.

The Mediterranean has one of the richest marine and coastal ecosystems in the world, but also one of the most vulnerable. Its rapid degradation requires swift, common and concrete responses, as well as further regional cooperation, involving all relevant actors, in the protection of this shared environment. We support efforts of the Coalition for an Exemplary Mediterranean in 2030 and we welcome its ambitions to protect marine biodiversity, in particular through the promotion of marine protected areas, contributing to our global objective of protecting 30% of land and seas. Equally important is to reduce the impact of fishing, combat marine pollution and promote sustainable shipping. A sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean promotes a modern, resource-efficient, resilient and competitive economy, improving livelihoods and contributing to social inclusion while preserving marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity. In this context, protecting the rights of insular states and regions remains a priority, while competitiveness of blue economy sectors must be enhanced with full respect towards the marine environment and resources, according to the notion of Mediterranean common goods.

In line with the Council Conclusions on a renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, we are committed to improve the business climate and attract **investment**, while tackling long-standing structural issues, such as unemployment, particularly affecting the youth. Participation of the private sector and the involvement of small and medium enterprises are crucial for success. To this end, promoting better access to information and innovation and strengthening the overall trade and economic relations in the region are essential and will be further supported. We will also step up cooperation with our Southern Neighbours on education and intensify cultural and scientific relations in order to promote credible and sustainable opportunities for youth, facilitating upskilling and reskilling.

We are determined to prioritise new and innovative renewable energy technologies and, in particular, hydrogen and offshore renewable energy, with the aim of achieving “green” energy transition with affordable energy prices for all end-users, including households and industries. Diversifying the energy mix is essential in order to ensure energy security and minimize natural and man-made risks. Energy

projects should aim at strengthening inter-connectivity in the region, also with other countries, and at contributing to de carbonization of our economies, peace and geopolitical stability. In this regard, we note that the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) serves as a platform of positive regional cooperation.

We acknowledge the vital and strategic role of maritime and combined transport in the Mediterranean, promoting **connectivity**, and an energy efficient and environmentally friendly mass transportation system. We highlight the need to ensure adequate synergies among EU funds and support to promote research and development for efficient and innovative technologies, also through cooperation with fora such as the Mediterranean Energy Observatory, to further prepare ships, ports, shipping activities, shipbuilding and energy production industries to support climate neutral and low-environmental-impact maritime transport activities. In this regard, we welcome maritime initiatives of the “fit for 55” package of the European commission to contribute to the -55% target, whilst ensuring that the competitiveness of the shipping industry is safeguarded against the backdrop of maintaining a global level playing field.

The Mediterranean is the cradle of historic **civilizations and cultures** of global importance that bring people together; Culture is our common mother-tongue enabling better and deeper understanding, peaceful coexistence and cooperation among peoples and countries. It is therefore important that Mediterranean leaders spearhead concrete initiatives and actions with the aim to boost cultural relations across the Mediterranean and to promote and protect the common cultural heritage, including through the cooperation of competent State and other Institutions and Organizations, reserving a lead role to civil society and people to people contacts.

We acknowledge and value the unique role played by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in enhancing cooperation across the region. In that spirit, we continue to look for further ways of bridging the two sides of the Mediterranean, with a special focus on the issue of regional integration, and taking into account the potential for creating or developing existing sub-regional and inter-regional formats.

The next Summit of the Southern countries of the EU will take place in Spain.